

## **The story of volunteer Building Bridges facilitator Corinne Plaisier**

**A bit hesitant and uncomfortable they arrived: five men from prison De Schie (Rotterdam) who were going to take part in the SOS Building Bridges course. Four other participants, who had become victims of a crime, were already inside, on a neat row on one side of the room.**

The prisoners took place on the other side so they could watch each other from a distance. I wondered how it would go, these two groups with their own stories. Would they be willing to listen to and learn from each other? And wouldn't it be too emotional? The beginning was scary for all of us, but soon the atmosphere became more relaxed. The participants were talking in groups led by Wim, Marieke and Esther. I walked around and heard to my joy that all participants did their best and listened to each other.

During these sessions we grew tremendously as a group. Not in numbers, but in mutual involvement. Therefore, it was a very special group. We heard each other's stories and that was not easy. There were heartbreaking stories of people who had experienced or done terrible things: robberies, violence, homicide, murder. We were often silent and there was a lot of crying. Sometimes one of the participants wanted to stop because it was really heavy. But they went on, our brave students. They cried, but dried their tears again and comforted each other. They confessed their mistakes, but got courage again through the love of others. As a trainer I often was marveled as I looked at it. I have so much admiration for these people, who not only didn't get stuck in their own pain, but were also moved with the pain of others. And so it could happen that an offender and a victim of a similar serious offense at the end of the course were sitting hand in hand and comforted each other. And that perpetrators and victims hugged and encouraged each other at the end of the course. It was wonderful to experience!